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## Editor's Notebook: Is Mexico the Last Domino?

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# EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

## IS MEXICO THE LAST DOMINO?

**T**he term national security is heard more frequently these days, especially with regard to the Caribbean and Central America. With revolution in El Salvador, Marxists in Nicaragua, a Soviet satellite in Cuba and general unrest in a number of other countries, the Reagan Administration is seeking to convince the American public that we must expand our commitment to this part of the world, and protect what the President calls our third border.

Amidst this debate over aid and advisers lies perhaps the most crucial issue of national security faced by this country since the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. Unlike most countries of the world, particularly European countries, the United States has enjoyed safe and secure borders. Only on rare occasions has the United States had to take action to protect itself from an unstable, revolutionary or threatening neighbor.

Canada, despite its size, economic nationalism and intermittent displeasure with the United States has not forced this country to adjust its security priorities or deploy military units on its common border. Canadian-U.S. relations have always been conducted in an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual trust.

To the south, Mexico has certainly experienced its share of conflict with the United States from war and an occasional military incursion to economic dependence and financial indebtedness. And yet Mexico has never been looked upon as a threat to our security or as a stepping stone for the advance of international communism. Mexican-U.S. relations have thus not surprisingly been conducted from a position of North American dominance and with a good deal of Yankee detachment and arrogance.

The revolution in El Salvador, however, is forcing the United States to reevaluate the strength and stability of its southern neighbor. With talk of falling dominoes in Central America and widespread Soviet efforts to gain influence in this region, Washington has already begun planning for

circumstances that could threaten the United States from the south. President Reagan recently stressed the importance of stopping Communist insurgency before we have to fight to save Mexico.

To many, this talk of dominoes and threats to Mexico is a well orchestrated attempt to drum up support for more money and men for El Salvador. It is hard for most Americans to envision their country bordering on a nation in the throes of Marxist revolution or even ultimately controlled by Moscow. And yet one cannot ignore the context in which Central American policy is being developed in Washington. The strategists and planners are no longer seeing the revolutions in that area as isolated occurrences, but as part of a distinct plan to intimidate the United States by creating instability, revolution and, if possible, a pro-Communist government in Mexico. We have reached a point now where the Reagan Administration is looking beyond El Salvador and beginning to think the impossible -- a Communist threat to our southern border.

At this point the prospects of Mexico becoming another El Salvador are remote. Although Mexico has serious income inequality, disparity of land ownership and a less-than-democratic governing system, it has shown itself to be a stable nation capable of handling internal unrest. The key, though, to its future stability may be its \$64 billion debt and the tumbling price of oil. As oil prices plummet and the debt \$80 billion debt and the tumbling price of oil. As oil prices plummet and the debt

skyrockets no one can predict with certainty whether the Mexican government would be able to hold the line.

But whether Mexico is able to maintain stability and hold the line against a Communist threat to the south is academic at this time. The important point is that the Reagan Administration is formulating policy from the premise that Mexico is vulnerable and that a real threat to our national security is now within the realm of the possible.

**A**s the debate over El Salvador evolves there are many who make comparisons to our early involvement in Vietnam and caution political leaders not to get mired in another guerrilla war. But should revolutionary activity increase in El Salvador, it may be difficult to say no to a Vietnam-style intervention, especially if the American public is convinced that there is more at stake there than just the fate of a tiny Central American country. The combination of war in El Salvador and a potential Iran-like situation on our southern border may be enough to spur American intervention. Americans would do well to watch closely as U.S. foreign policy develops in this part of the hemisphere. For the first time since the missiles of October, 1962, this country is embroiled in a controversy that will test our definition of national security and our willingness to once again become a policeman in the Caribbean Basin.

Michael J. Kryzanek

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